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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2490
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7066
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001911

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM PREF MOPS CE
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES IN CAHOOTS
WITH KARUNA?

REF: A) COLOMBO 1895 B) COLOMBO 1896 C) COLOMBO 1887

D) COLOMBO 1622 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: The Batticaloa-based Karuna group, which split from the northern Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in March 2004, has opened political offices in Colombo, the east, and the northern town of Vavuniya. The group's public relations wing preaches the virtues of "devolution" and embraces the democratic process. At the same time, its military wing remains a constant threat to the LTTE, especially in the East. Most observers believe that elements of the government security forces are providing support to the Karuna group and employing it as a tool in the fight against their common enemy, the LTTE. There are many indications that the Karuna faction, even as it seeks respectability, has not abandoned terror as a tactic: Karuna cadres are the chief suspects in the November 10 assassination of Tamil MP Raviraj, a moderate who supported LTTE political goals. United Nations Special Advisor on Children and Armed Conflict Allen Rock's finding "elements of the government security forces are supporting and sometimes participating in the abductions and forced recruitment of children by the Karuna faction" has created an opening for Embassy to deliver a strong private message to the government about its relationship to the Karuna group. End Summary.

Background: Eastern Commander of LTTE Deserts, Sets up Own Group

¶12. (C) In March 2004, LTTE eastern commander Vinayakamoorthy Muraleetharan, a.k.a. Karuna Amman, defected from Prabhakaran's northern organization to found his own anti-LTTE militant organization. Karuna, regional LTTE commander of Batticaloa and Ampara districts since 1987, took with him several hundred Tiger cadres -- perhaps as many as one fourth of the LTTE total. When the split occurred, the LTTE at first said it was a purely internal matter. The LTTE now maintains that the Karuna group is a paramilitary under

the terms of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and must be disarmed by the Government. The GSL publicly insists that the Karuna split is "an internal LTTE organizational issue."

¶13. (C) The "Karuna faction" continues to operate as a paramilitary force. On September 27, 2006, the independent daily Morning Leader published a photograph of approximately 120 Karuna special weapons training graduates who soon would be "directly employed in chasing away the LTTE from the East." Attacks on LTTE cadres, political representatives and supporters have weakened the LTTE's position in government-controlled areas. The Tigers have since closed offices and ended most political work there.

¶14. (C) Human rights watchers and the LTTE have accused the Karuna Faction of colluding with Government of Sri Lanka security forces in extra-judicial killings and abductions, and of waging guerrilla warfare in the east against the mainstream LTTE. That elements of the GSL security forces cooperate with or at least turn a blind eye to Karuna cadres is an open secret in Sri Lanka -- but solid proof has been lacking. In a January 2006 report, UN Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial Killings and Abductions Philip Alston claimed: "There is strong circumstantial evidence of (at least) informal cooperation between Government forces and members of the Karuna group. I received credible reports from civil society groups of persons abducted by the Karuna group being released at military bases." A representative of the NGO umbrella group Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies told POL FSN on November 6 that many Karuna camps in the east are visible within fifty meters of Sri Lankan Army bases. Rock's report is likely to contain greater evidence of collaboration between the Sri Lankan military and the Karuna group.

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Changing Tiger Stripes for Suits

¶15. (C) In March 2006, the "Karuna Faction" opened its first political office in Batticaloa, registering a political party called the Tamil Mukal Vidutalai Pulikal (TMVP, or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers). The TMVP has since opened offices in Colombo, Vavuniya and Trincomalee, and plans a Jaffna office soon. Poloff visited the TMVP Colombo office on November 1. Several police officers and metal roadblocks guarded the large and modern house, located in one of Colombo's more affluent neighborhoods. Several large posters of Karuna Amman in a suit (rather than military fatigues) adorned the walls of a well-appointed receiving room.

¶16. (C) We spoke with party secretary "Pathmini," who declined to give her last name. She asserted that the TMVP had broken away from the LTTE because the LTTE "are imperialists who don't believe in democracy." She said the TMVP believes in "maximum devolution" while recognizing the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. The TMVP's military faction operates for self-defense only against Prabhakaran's Tigers, she insisted, stating that the Karunas are "not assisting the security forces. We operate on our own." She added, "when the LTTE lays down arms, so will we." According to Pathmini, the TMVP and LTTE are involved in a "traditional war" with each other. She noted that, unlike the LTTE, the TMVP does not believe in suicide attacks or terrorism.

"Hoodwinked by the LTTE in the Name of Eelam"

¶17. (C) Pathmini insisted that the TMVP's public support increased tremendously when the group "joined the democratic mainstream." She said that the TMVP does not want to be known as the Karuna Faction, or as the eastern LTTE because they are essentially a "people's democratic movement." Pathmini argued: "The Tamil people have been hoodwinked by the LTTE in the name of Eelam (the Tamil homeland). Prabhakaran and his supporters are not peace lovers. In

2002, Prabhakaran told the Tigers that the peace process was only to rebuild their military strength. We broke away from him because we realized he could never solve the Tamils' problems."

¶8. (C) In a November 2 meeting with poloff, Bandula Jayasekara, editor of the government Daily News newspaper, echoed some of Pathmini's contentions. While returning from the October 28-29 Geneva talks he had met some of Karuna's senior leadership in London, he said. He argued that having "put on suits," the TMVP has seen the futility of military action. "They don't want to fight," he said, "and they don't want to be known as the eastern Tigers. They want only to be known as the TMVP." Bandula said he had offered the TMVP space in his newspaper to publish a statement to this effect.

Karuna Switched Sides - But Not His Tactics

¶9. (U) Following a 10 day mission to Sri Lanka, United Nations Special Advisor on Children and Armed Conflict Allen Rock told the press his mission "found strong and credible evidence that elements of the government security forces are supporting and sometimes participating in the abductions and forced recruitment of children by the Karuna faction." (Ref A details Rock's briefing to Ambassadors and heads of mission.) Rock cited eyewitness reports in which security forces had detained young Tamil males from which Karunas could select fresh recruits. Rock noted that police have failed to respond to abduction complaints saying, "we're safer here because of Karuna - why don't you complain when the LTTE takes your children?" and "your own Tamil people

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took your child. We can't do anything about it."

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Karuna's defection from the Tigers, and his new push for respectability, do not change the fact that he emerged from a terrorist movement. His group continues to employ some tried- and-true LTTE tactics for its purposes. Particularly reprehensible is his use of abductions both to recruit child soldiers, and as a fund-raising technique (ref C). So is the group's use of political assassination - if Karuna's responsibility for Raviraj's killing can be established (ref B). Authorities will readily admit that the LTTE-Karuna split has tipped the balance in favor of the security forces, but none of our government interlocutors is willing to admit a direct link between the TMVP and the government. However, these protestations to the contrary, collusion between elements of the GSL and the TMVP or Karuna faction is a generally accepted fact in Sri Lanka. This is toxic to the peace process. Allan Rock, the first credible international authority to advance solid evidence for the connection, has opened up a space for the U.S., the Co-Chairs, and other influential countries to press the government in private to clear up and end the murky relationship between parts of their security forces and the Karuna faction, close the military wing down entirely, and, if they choose, pursue their goals through peaceful political means.

BLAKE